

Summary of the 19-20 Nov 2005 Releases from Pro-Med Avian Influenza Results from Canada

A low-pathogenic strain of the H5N1 avian influenza virus has been discovered in wild migratory birds in the central province of Manitoba, Canadian officials announced over the weekend [19-20 Nov 2005].

The virus was *not* the same strain that killed more than 60 people and prompted the culling of millions of birds in Asia since 2003, said Brian Evans of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency.

"Canadians can rest assured that we have not detected the Asian strain of avian influenza of animal or human health concern," Evans said. "The strain detected in Manitoba is completely distinct from the strain currently present in Asia."

Tests revealed low pathogenic strains of H5N9 in 2 birds and H5N2 in 5 birds in the western province of British Columbia, H5N1 in 2 birds from the central province of Manitoba and H5N3 in 2 birds from the eastern Quebec province, officials said.

All of the viruses analyzed were "low pathogenic types," "very mild" and "non-virulent" and would produce "only mild disease if any at all if introduced into domestic birds," Evans said.

The samples were gathered by the Canadian Wildlife Services as part of a cross-country testing of viruses carried by wild waterfowl, coordinated through the Canadian Cooperative Wildlife Health Centre.

On Friday [18 Nov 2005], Canadian officials announced the discovery of the H5 avian influenza virus in a single [domestic] duck. Health officials immediately quarantined the farm, located in the Fraser Valley, east of Vancouver.

Initial tests last week found an H5-type strain in the duck during routine tests. "This morning, test results ... confirmed that the H5 virus found in a domestic duck in British Columbia is the low pathogenic, North American strain," Cornelius Kiley, a CFIA veterinarian, said in a briefing on Sunday [20 Nov 2005]. "This confirmation means that we are looking at a virus capable of causing only mild disease, if any at all. It also means that we are not dealing with the virus current in Asia and Europe," Kiley added. "This particular subtype is unique to this part of the world, and we have previously seen it throughout North America."

Officials speculated that the duck may have contracted the disease from migratory birds.

Kiley said that while there is no immediate risk to domestic birds, the agency will proceed with a cull of about 60 000 ducks and geese on the infected duck's farm. In addition, the CFIA has also quarantined 4 other "high risk" farms and expects test results within days, he said.

The commercial farm where the latest case of bird flu was found also faced a cull in 2004.

An outbreak of an H7 type of bird flu in the Fraser Valley last year [2004] spread quickly among farms and eventually caused officials to cull 16 million poultry in the area.